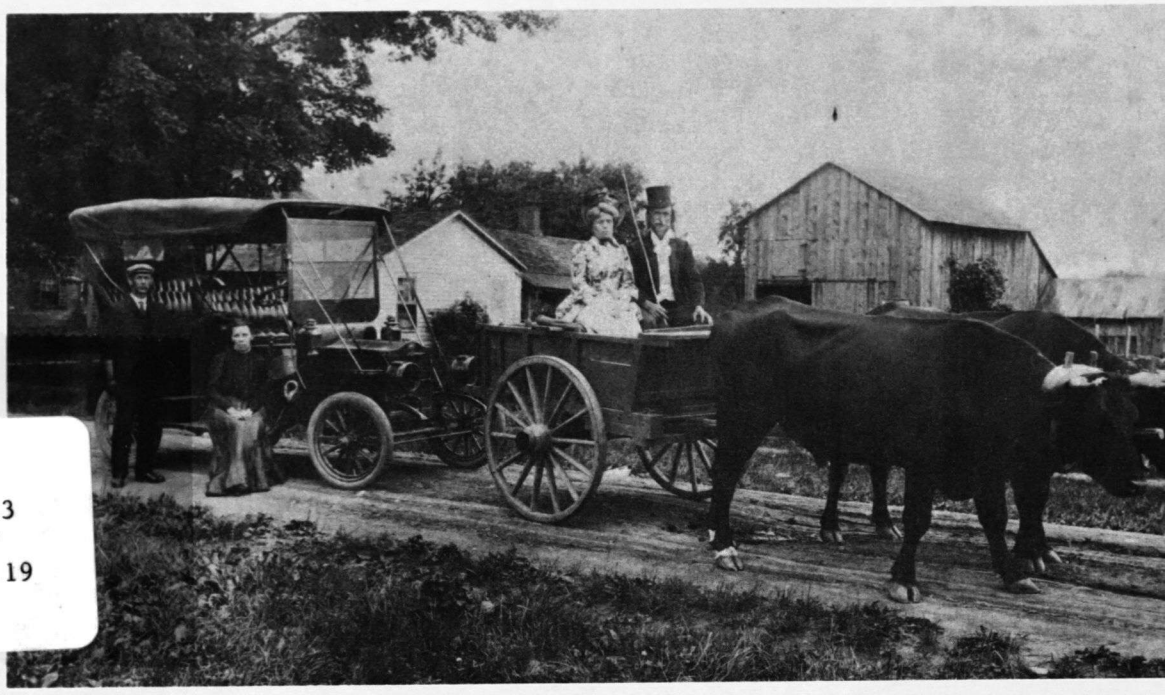
A HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF

MARILLA



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Oxcart and touring car travel dirt roads in Marilla.

by Charles A. Neumann

Marilla is one of the younger towns of Erie County. Situated near the center of the eastern border of the county, it is bordered by Alden on the north, Wales on the south, Elma on the west, and Wyoming County on the east. Big Buffalo Creek crosses its southern corner, but it is drained chiefly by the Little Buffalo Creek and its tributaries.

On the second day of December, 1853, the Town of Marilla was formed by State Law from land which was formerly part of the towns of Wales and Alden. Originally almost all of its area had been part of the Buffalo Creek Indian Reservation. Settlement had begun about 1826.

The settlers purchased their lands from the Ogden Land Company, which had acquired preemption rights to the reservation from the Holland Land Company in 1810 and had purchased the land from the Indians in 1826 and 1842. Soon two roads were laid out across the area. One ran south from Marilla Village to Porterville and north to Alden. It was only two rods wide (33 feet) and was soon

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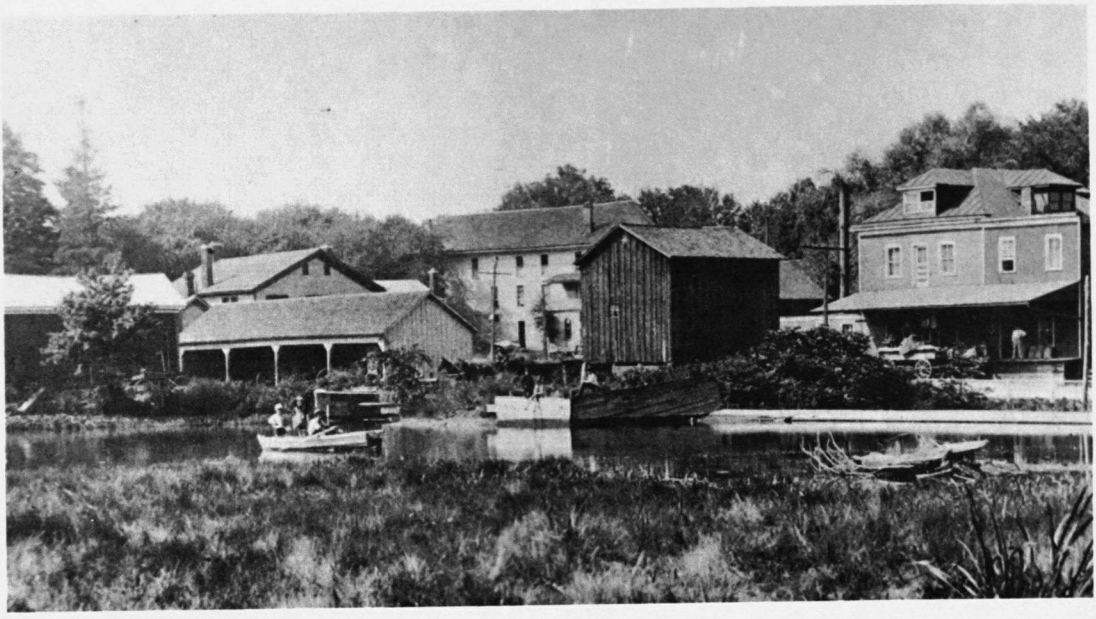

Small businesses in the midst of a farming community.

known as the "Two Rod Road." It was later improved and widened to regulation size. The other road ran parallel to the first one, about one mile farther east, and being the usual width of four rods, was soon called "Four Rod Road."

The first homes in Marilla were built along the east side of Two Rod Road near the site of the present village of Marilla. For a short time the settlement was called "Shanty Town" because the main industry among the settlers was making shingles. Named Marilla after the wife of an early settler, John Rogers, the settlement grew rapidly with typical pioneer businesses thriving in the territory – saw and grist mills, stores, a blacksmith shop, and of course, taverns. In 1865, much of this business district was destroyed by fire, but it was soon rebuilt. Marilla was to know both fire and flood. On June 21, 1937, the town experienced a major flood which damaged many crops on the community's farmlands.

One of the earliest settlers in Marilla was Jesse Bartoo who located on a farm in the southwestern part of the town in 1827. The area was known as "Bartoo's Mills" for several years after this. Bartoo attained some small fame when he invented and received a patent for the "Bartoo Water Wheel" in 1858. Jesse Bartoo was elected the first Town Supervisor. A descendent of Jesse Bartoo, A. Donald Bartoo, became the first Superintendent of the Iroquois Central School System many years later. The name of the hamlet was changed to Porterville a few years later when Archibald Porter bought property in the area. Williston is another small hamlet in the town of Wales located at the intersection of Williston and Three Rod Roads. The hamlet is named for Eugene, John, and James Willis, who built a sawmill there in the early 1860's.

The first store of any size in the village of Marilla was opened in 1847 by

Niles Carpenter. He also opened the "Spring Hotel," so named because it was situated near a spring. Two years later the hotel was burned, but was soon rebuilt. Through the years it had different owners, one being the Simon Brewery, and has eventually become a tavern and residence. It was in the home of Niles Carpenter that the first Town Meeting was held on March 7, 1854. Carpenter became Town Supervisor in 1856.

At about this time, George W. and Jeremiah Carpenter bought land on the Four Rod Road east of the village. George gave the land for a cemetery which was the start of the present Evergreen Cemetery on Two Rod Road. Ironically, records show that Carpenter's son, Glezen Fillmore Carpenter was the first person to be buried there. In Maplewood Cemetery on East Avenue, the oldest recorded grave was that of Sarah Jane Kelsey who died February 14, 1857. Maple Rest Cemetery on a knoll overlooking Porterville Road is one of the oldest cemeteries in this locality. While there is no known record of its organization, the first burial was in 1847.

Porterville Mill.

In 1829, Joseph Carpenter settled near his brothers on Four Rod Road. Ira and Justus Gates purchased ten acres of land from Joseph and built a frame house and sawmill, two of the earliest buildings erected on the site of the present village. The sawmill later became a cheese factory. Other stores followed Carpenter's. One of the best known was that of G. C. Monchow who was in partnership with other men and later his son, Louis. After the death of the partners and then of his father, Louis continued the business until his death in 1943. His widow still carries on the business.

The first blacksmith shop was established in 1851 by F. H. Mason, while Lynn Ford started the first wagon shop about the same time. Later, Peter Petz operated a blacksmith shop on Two Rod Road. This was sold to John Kratt who in turn sold to William Roloff in 1921. With his son Kenneth Roloff, he still runs the shop.

An occupation well suited to Marilla in its earlier days was that of operating ice houses. About 1865, the Village built a dam across Little Buffalo Creek near the bridge on Two Rod Road. This was a source of water power for the mills, furnished water for firefighting, and provided recreational benefits for the community. In the summer, swimming, bathing, and boating were available, while skating could be enjoyed in the winter. Ice was cut from the lake thus formed and stored in ice houses. When the warm weather arrived, the ice was delivered to the various customers who placed it in their home ice boxes for refrigeration. This dam was washed out in a flood in 1922, but soon more modern methods of refrigeration were to come to the town. However, in the middle 1930's ice was still being delivered to homes on Three

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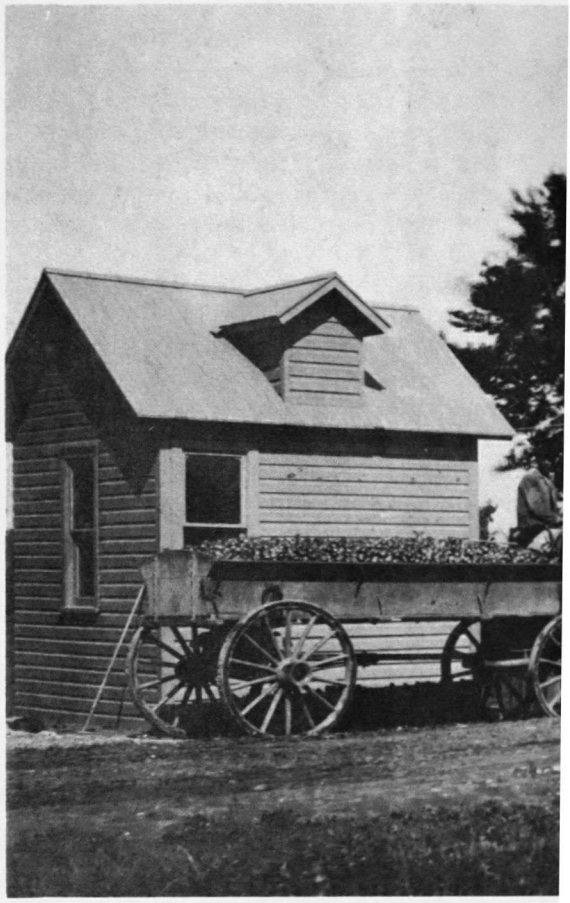
Rod Road where there was no electric, gas, or telephone service.

The first school teacher on record in the town was Sophia Day, who taught a small school in 1823 for the generous salary of $30 a term, plus her room and board in a nearby home. A larger two room school was erected later, and in 1932 a four room elementary school was built on Bullis Road. The high school pupils were sent to Lancaster or East Aurora where many of them boarded with friends or relatives during the week when school was in session. In 1952, however, the Town of Marilla schools united with those of Wales and Elma to form the Iroquois Central School System. Each town has its elementary school buildings. The pupils are transported by bus to the Junior and Senior High Schools, located in the Town of Elma.

Sometimes following the establishment of schools, but often preceding them, was the formation of societies for worship. A Methodist Church was organized early in the town's history, its first meetings being held on what is now the Charles Foss farm on the corner of Four Rod Road and East Avenue. After about two years, a small barn-like building was erected on the east bank of the Little Buffalo Creek on East Avenue. Meetings were held until 1850 in this "Barn Meeting House" which was built by the members. In 1854 the present building was erected on Two Rod Road. Since then there have been further improvements and additions – an organ was installed in 1915 and renovations were made in 1948 and 1967.

A Baptist Society – at first a Free Will Baptist – was organized in 1873. Their building on Bullis Road underwent extensive renovations in 1970. A Disciple Society was formed in 1856, completed a church building in 1859, and

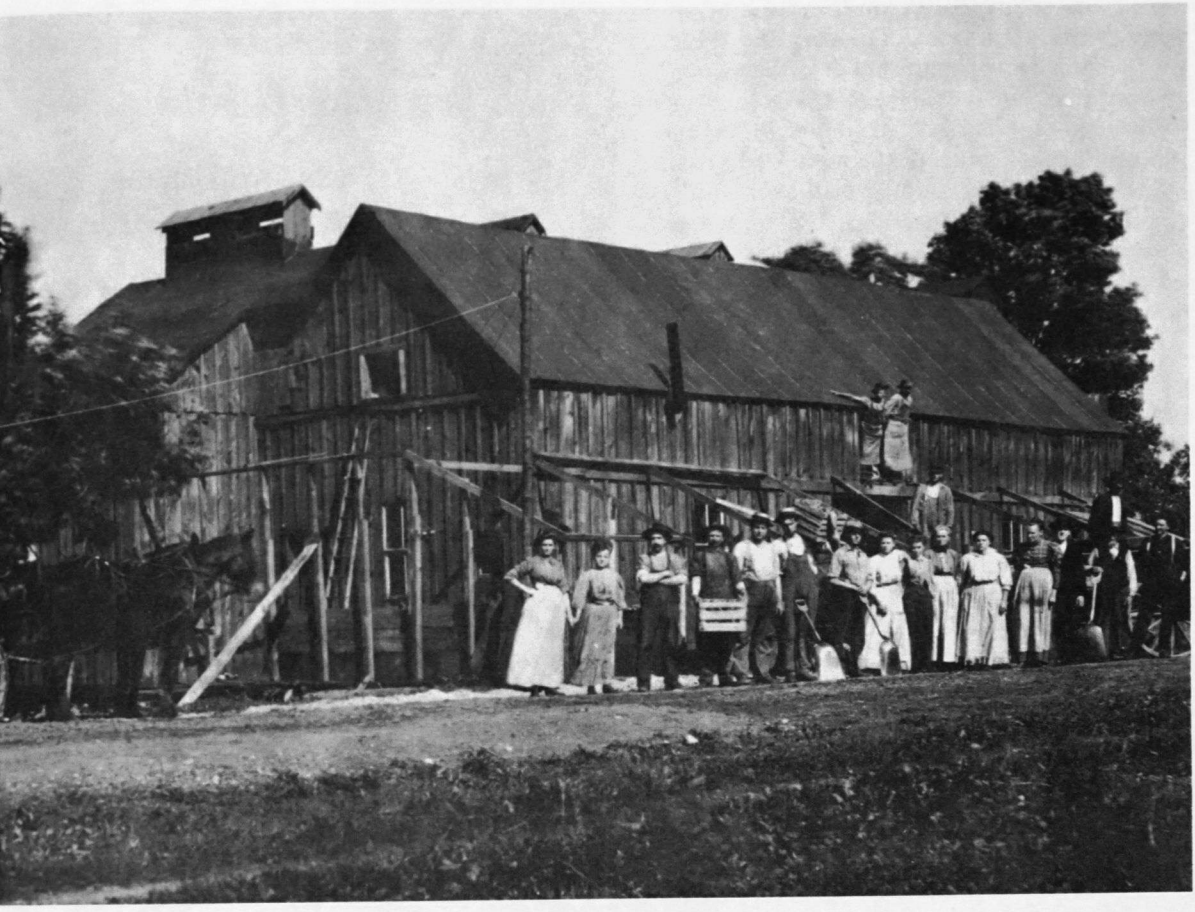


disbanded in 1884. The building became the Marilla Town and Fire Hall, until it was recently remodeled for use as a Town Highway building.

A Roman Catholic Church was built on East Avenue in 1854 under the direction of Father Early of Buffalo. The membership dwindled, however, until in 1884, only 14 families were active. Its building was abandoned and the parishioners attended Alden and Elma Churches.

A United Brethren congregation was organized in Williston in 1869. A building was erected in 1871 and enlarged in 1946 and 1961. Special services on

Buffalo History Museum



Apple drier on Bullis Road.

August 7th and 8th, 1971, will mark the church's Centennial. Over the years this congregation has become, first, the Evangelical United Brethren and now, the United Methodist Church of Williston.

Porterville also had an early church, a Lutheran Society organized in 1836. Its first building was erected in 1865 on Four Rod Road. Four years later it moved to a new location on the corner of Four Rod and Liberia Roads. A new and larger brick building was built in 1928 on the same site as the home of the St. Nichodemus Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The Volunteer Fire Department was founded as the result of a local fire in the former home of G. C. Monchow, in which a man lost his life. This tragedy made many of the townspeople realize the need for a fire department. A meeting was held in the Grange Hall on August 31, 1923, at which it was unanimously agreed that such a company should be organized at once. It was at this time that the old Disciple Church building which had become the Town Hall, was remodeled for use as a Fire Hall, also.

Assisted by the members of the West Seneca Fire Department, a constitu-

tion and by-laws resembling that company's were adopted. Officers and directors were elected, equipment ordered, and a group of interested citizens trained as volunteer firemen. The department has grown and improved through the years. It outgrew its first small hall and a new brick structure was completed and dedicated on October 21, 1962. A Ladies Auxiliary was formed in 1926, with 38 Charter members.

A mail route once ran between Marilla and Elma, the mail being carried by stagecoach. Later the mail was brought on the Erie Railroad to a stop near Two Rod Road in the Town of Alden, which was known as the Marilla Station. It was collected once a day and brought to the Marilla Post Office. At present, the mail is brought by truck to nearby centers where it is picked up by a mail route driver.

The Post Office has had several different locations over the years. At one time it was located in a building owned by G. C. Monchow which stood on the corner of Two Rod and Bullis Roads. George Adams was the first Postmaster. The building had an active life, being used later by the Genesee Bus Line. It was then moved across Two Rod where it became Andy Rich's barber shop. Later still, it was used as a meeting room by the Marilla Veterans Club. Its earlier site became the location of Oscar Offhaus' garage.

Later Post Offices were in Harry Foster's grocery store on Bullis Road, Ewell's building on Two Rod, and Robert Moore's building on Bullis. At present, it occupies a leased Colonial type brick building on West Avenue, erected by the New York Telephone Company as a substation.

A unique business which stood on Bullis Road opposite the Baptist Church was an apple evaporator. In operation in the early 1900's, the building was later moved to Two Rod Road where it became a garage. One of the town's more prosperous businesses for some years was a modern creamery operated by Harry W. Shearing, who later became a Supervisor. The creamery was closed in 1837.

Blacksmith shop still operating in Marilla.

Societies in the town included the Marilla Grange No. 1133, organized in 1908 with Samuel B. Webster as Master, a Home Bureau (1920), Marilla Veterans Club (1949), Woman's Auxiliary of the Veterans Club (1950), and the Marilla Civic League (1950).

A book circle called "The Book Lovers' Club" was formed in 1912 under the leadership of Dr. and Mrs. L. B. Lougee. Its organization meeting was held February 12, 1913, in the home of Mr. and Mrs. E. H. Ewell. A constitution was drawn up and a hall was procured where various types of entertainment could be presented for the purpose of raising money for a future library building. The books remained in the home of Mrs. Lougee for 23 years, during which time she acted as librarian without remuneration. Three hundred and seven of the original 596

books in the collection were donated.

During the depression of the early 1930's, the Public Works Administration granted assistance to the town by furnishing labor to erect a library building. Dedication ceremonies were held on May 8, 1936. Since 1948, the library has been a member of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library system. Mrs. Lougee continued as Librarian until her death in the middle 1950's. She was assisted by Mrs. Millie Fish. In 1957 Laura Neumann was appointed Librarian. She was assisted by Edith Pritting followed by Dorothy Harbison. After the retirement of Mrs. Neumann, Mrs. Harbison became Librarian. She is assisted by Jane Snyder. Over 9,000 books are in the library today, in addition to records and magazines.

The Marilla Historical Society was organized in 1962, with Howard Eldridge, Jr. as first president. Charles A. Neumann was elected to the presidency in 1963 and has been re-elected annually since that time. The Society has been an active one, obtaining its permanent charter on April 19, 1970. A historical marker was placed at the site of the first grist mill on Little Buffalo Creek at Two Rod Road on May 21, 1967. As part of the observance of Erie County's Sesquicentennial a second marker was dedicated on June 27, 1971, at 11495 Bullis Road, site of the oldest house in the town. The original logs still form three interior walls in the living room. The Society's exhibits are housed in the basement of the Marilla Free Library building. Mrs. Henrietta Ewell

Weary workers homeward bound.

was Town Historian for 15 years until her death in 1970. Charles Neumann is the present Historian.

A new Town Hall was dedicated on May 30, 1970, on the site of the former Grange Hall. In addition to the Town offices it contains meeting rooms which are available for groups upon request.

Today, Marilla's businesses include feed mills, gravel pits, florists, gas stations, garages, an old-fashioned country store, and a funeral home. Noted as a farming area for many years, it is gradually becoming a residential community. From a population of 2,252 in 1960, it grew to 3,202 in 1970. Social and educational activities are well maintained with several churches, a centralized school system, and an excellent library.

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